

Transportation

Description of Existing Transportation Systems

To date transportation development in the unit has been piecemeal at best, with the Little Susitna River severely hampering overland access west. Private land along Flathorn Lake and open-to-entry parcels surrounding lakes and along Fish Creek in the northern portion of the unit have dictated the primary need for access routes in the area.

Existing transportation: man-made. An old tractor trail leading to a homestead at Flathorn Lake and believed to have been built in the 1950's is the only known attempt within the project area at constructed vehicular overland access from the Little Susitna River west. This route is now impassable because of heavy second growth vegetation. In addition, road fill at stream crossings has eroded, making those crossings impassable.

The only other known route cleared specifically for transportation purposes is the historic Iditarod Trail. This route initially served as the mail route from Anchorage to lands west and runs diagonally through the unit from the Little Susitna River to Susitna Station. The trail at present is in poor condition and receives minimal use. However, the Iditarod Trailblazers plan to upgrade this trail in the near future.

Numerous seismic lines crisscrossing the unit and a cleared township line (between Townships 16 and 17 North) offer other man-made overland routes through the unit.

Three private airstrips have been built in the unit to provide access to parcels along Flathorn (2) and Redshirt (1) lakes. (See the Existing Transportation Map, page 27)





Existing transportation: natural. Contiguous wetlands and stream corridors provide winter north/south access within the unit. Additionally, year-round air access is possible via the numerous lakes within the unit.



Current uses. The majority of existing transportation routes within the unit are useable only during winter months. The Iditarod Race Trail follows a seismic line that runs from the Little Susitna River to Flathorn Lake. From Flathorn Lake the trail follows wetlands to Susitna Station, where it crosses the Susitna River.

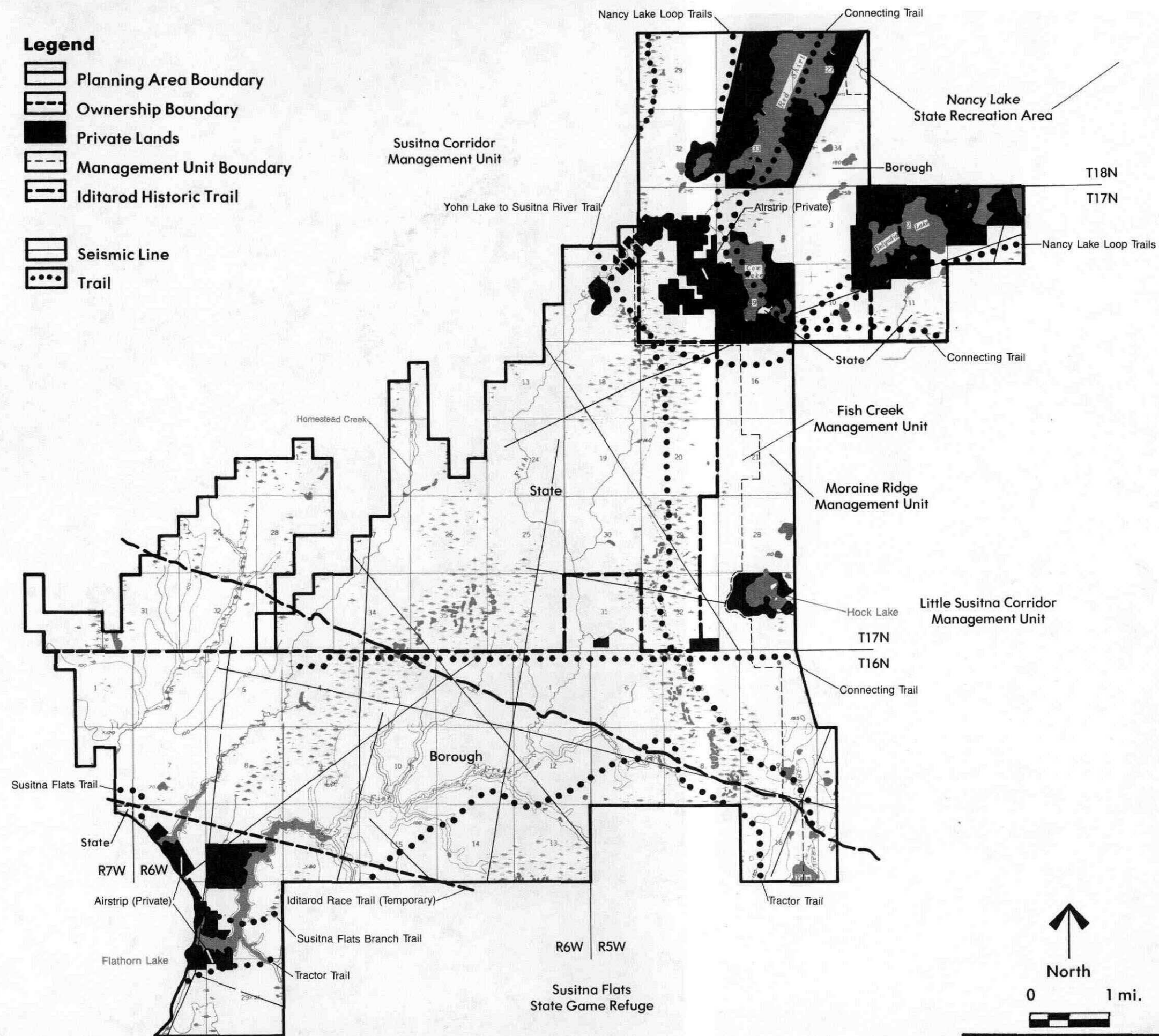
Other seismic lines provide potential access but are not used to any extent, partially because of the difficulty of crossing streams.

The cleared township line receives moderate use, since it provides a corridor from the Big Lake Road, over Moraine Ridge, to the Susitna River.

Legend

-  Planning Area Boundary
-  Ownership Boundary
-  Private Lands
-  Management Unit Boundary
-  Iditarod Historic Trail

-  Seismic Line
-  Trail



FISH CREEK Management Plan

Existing Transportation

In the northern portion, winter access is possible via trails from the Long Lake Road into the Redshirt Lake area.

Adjacent winter transportation routes. A winter haul road is constructed annually for shipment of materials from Anchorage to Tyonek and the Beluga coal fields. This haul road runs south of the Fish Creek unit in the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge. Four-wheel drive winter access to Flathorn Lake is possible from this haul road.

Transportation Needs

Two levels of transportation systems were considered in development of road layouts within the Fish Creek unit: regional, or primary road systems, and local, or secondary road systems.

Regional (primary) system: east/west route. With the anticipated development of the Beluga coal fields, there may be need for an overland transportation system. If the Knik Arm crossing from Anchorage to Point MacKenzie is built, it would make more realistic a western expansion of the existing intrastate transportation network.

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT) has evaluated the potential for expansion west and has performed preliminary horizontal alignment studies. The result of these studies is the Chuitna River-Goose Bay corridor [shown on state land status plats as an a right-of-way application (ADL 57588)]. This corridor was re-evaluated during the Fish Creek plan design process and was rerouted somewhat north of the existing application. The realignment fits better with the proposed tract layout.

The basic criteria used by DOT in identifying this alignment were:

- ° to stay north of the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge in order to take advantage of more gravelly, stable soils and to avoid Cook Inlet tidal influences when crossing the Susitna River; and
- ° to stay as far south as possible in order to provide a more direct route from Anchorage to Tyonek.

North/south route. A Knik Arm crossing would increase the potential for an intrastate road corridor connecting Point MacKenzie with points north on the Parks Highway. Several alternative corridors were identified by Department of Transportation for this purpose. One, a direct route to Fairbanks, lies just west of Moraine Ridge, in the agricultural subunit of Fish Creek. Another alternative known as the Houston corridor, provides the shortest access to the area around Big Lake where most population growth is likely to occur. This is currently the north approach to the Knik crossing site that is preferred by the Department of Transportation and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The Department of Natural Resources prefers the route through Fish Creek. In any case, if the Knik Arm crossing is built, it is probable that there will eventually be a highway from Point MacKenzie through Fish Creek to Willow.

Alternate north/south routes within the Fish Creek unit. The Fish Creek planning team considered two alternative locations for the north-south corridor through the study area: (1) along the western toe slopes of Moraine Ridge, and (2) further west in the agricultural subunit.

Factors considered in evaluation of these two alternatives are:

- ° soils;
- ° slope;
- ° stream crossings;
- ° distance;
- ° cost;
- ° overall alignment;
- ° overall compatability with the proposed land use; and
- ° effect on private lands.

See Chapter Three for further discussion of these two alternatives.

Local (secondary) system. A secondary road system is needed in the Fish Creek unit to provide access from primary (regional) roads to farm tracts.

In development of a secondary road system for Fish Creek the following general design criteria was used:

- ° Spacing of primary/secondary road intersections should be at least two miles apart to provide for proper signing on the main road for future interchanges.
- ° Stream crossings should be minimized.
- ° All stream crossings should be perpendicular to the water channel.
- ° Routing of roads parallel to streams should be avoided.
- ° Sufficient space should be left on either side of road for buffers when routing near streams or wetlands.
- ° Roads should be designed to serve as large an area as practicable with as small an expenditure as possible.
- ° Poorly drained areas should be avoided.
- ° A free flowing circulation pattern should be provided.

Proposed Alaska Railroad route. In anticipation of a potential industrial port facility at Point MacKenzie, the borough has studied corridors that would provide a more direct route by rail from points north to Point MacKenzie. The borough's study recommended a route traversing Moraine Ridge from southeast to northwest.

Susitna hydroelectric project transmission line. The proposed right-of-way for the proposed Susitna hydroelectric project runs through the Fish Creek area from north to south (see Master Plan Map). The Alaska Power Authority proposes that the width of the right-of-way, located primarily in wetlands, be 400 feet. This line will not be built unless the Susitna dam is built. If the line is built as proposed, three tracts will be affected: tracts 37, 40, and 44.